

Spring Vegetable Platter

From Tracy Beard's personal collection of favorite spring appetizers

Italian Stuffed Artichokes

Serves 4

- 2 globe artichokes (trim the tips, a small amount off the stem, and leave most of the stem intact)
- 2 tablespoons Italian herbs
- 4 ounces melted butter
- 3 cups fresh white or wheat bread crumbs (grind in a food processor or blender to a fine crumb)
- 1 ounce grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 ounces water
- 2 tablespoons vinegar (white or apple cider)
- Water to boil artichokes
- Fork or wooden skewer

Fill a large stock pot ¾ full with water and add vinegar, bring to a boil. Trim artichokes and drop them into boiling water. Cook on medium high until you can pierce with a wooden skewer or fork. Drain and let cool. Once cool to the touch, slice lengthwise in half through the stem. Scoop out and discard the choke.

Toss breadcrumbs, herbs, and Parmesan in a small bowl. Add melted butter and water until you have a moist dressing consistency. Gently spread the artichoke leaves and place a bit of the stuffing in between each leaf and some in the center. Place in a greased glass dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes and then place under the broiler for 5 minutes until toasty brown in color. Serve with Dijon dip.



Vegetable platter of stuffed artichokes, fresh asparagus and spinach. PHOTO BY TRACY BEARD

Dijon Dip

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 ½ tablespoons Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon Kosher salt

Place all ingredients in a bowl and mix thoroughly. Chill and serve in an attractive bowl with vegetables.

Asparagus Wrapped in Prosciutto

- 1 bunch medium thickness fresh asparagus
- 1 package sliced prosciutto (my favorite is prosciutto di Parma)
- 2 tablespoons Kosher salt
- Bowl with water and 12 ice cubes

Snap the bottom off one stem of asparagus where it breaks easiest. Line up remaining bunch and trim all stems to the same length. Rinse asparagus with water. Boil a big pot of water with 2 tablespoons Kosher salt. Drop asparagus into boiling salted

water blanching for 30-45 seconds or until crisp tender and bright green. You should be able to pierce easily with a fork; be sure not to overcook.

Drain immediately and place asparagus into icy water bowl. Allow stems to cool and pat dry with a paper towel.

Cut each slice of prosciutto lengthwise down the middle. Gentle wrap each asparagus spear with a ½ piece of prosciutto. Serve with Dijon dip and artichokes.

Feel free to put together your own spring appetizer platter adding additional vegetables like snap peas, lettuces, spinach, carrots, radishes, or anything else you enjoy.

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World-class appetizers

Travel & food writer shares favorites

Story and photos by Tracy Beard

The first bite at any restaurant, diner, or even in your own home sets the tone for an enticing dining experience. On my travels over the past year I have enjoyed a variety of stunning, delicious, and adventurous first courses. Whether it's called an aperitif, aperitivo, hors d'oeuvre, or just a simple appetizer, I want to share some of my favorites with you.



#1 Ultimate Favorite

The Shrimp and Crab Stack, created by Chef Ronald St. Pierre at Locals Restaurant in Comox Valley, Vancouver Island, Canada, received my all-time favorite award for 2017 first courses. I was fortunate to try this stunning and amazing dish the first time while attending the BC Shellfish Festival. It was so light, clean, and intense that I chose it a second time with my daughter, Brittney, while traveling to the same area to write a story about a Girls' Wellness Getaway at Kingfisher Oceanside Resort & Spa.

Chef Ronald uses fresh local seafood, sprout greens from the local farmers' market, and short-grain sticky rice. He layers the ingredients and decorates the plate with wasabi aioli created in-house, pickled ginger, and toasted sesame seeds.

#1 Best Setting with Unique Bites

Part of any dining experience is where you eat. The atmosphere can enhance or detract from any great meal. Traveling up the St. Lawrence River on an adventure expedition with Adventure Canada, cruisers, including myself, savored an outdoor hors d'oeuvre extravaganza prepared by local chef Jean-Sébastien Sicard from Chez Mathilde Restaurant in Tadoussac, Quebec.

Warming myself by the blazing bonfire, I dined on pork pâté with a confit of onions, gravlax (a Scandinavian dish of dry-cured salmon) studded with pine needles and fresh thyme and glazed with sour cream, truffle-dotted deviled eggs, and a sweet croissant filled with blueberries and chocolate.

#1 Richest, Creamiest, and Most Artistically Designed

I spent a good deal of time in Sonoma Country during the summer months prior to the horrific fires. While on assignment writing stories about luxurious dining in the area, I feasted at Valette in Healdsburg, California. Chef Dustin Valette uses Asian flavors to enhance some of the best seafood and produce in his Hawaiian Ahi Poke.

The fresh ahi tuna, tossed in a soy kombu emulsion, rests on top of a seaweed salad with crispy fried avocados. The fresh clean taste of the seafood blends perfectly with the crunchy avocado, creating luxurious textures in the mouth. To intensify the beauty of the plate, an edible flower and thinly sliced watermelon radishes adorn the dish.

#1 Easy to Assemble and Perfect for a Crowd

Festivals are a great place to experience new foods and get fresh ideas. I attended Feast Portland and met numerous talented local chefs and discovered an assortment of new culinary ideas.

Chef Alan Maniscalco from Rally Pizza in Vancouver, Washington, fashioned a delectable bite just right for serving large groups. His Cheesy Bites made with hand-pulled mozzarella was crafted from an especially creamy curd from Rhode Island.

The luscious cheese arrived sliced and topped with a black raspberry puree made from blackcap raspberries grown in the Midwest and Oregon. These extra-sweet berries pureed with sugar and a bit of vinegar made for a tangy twist on top of the succulent cheese. Each bite came adorned with pickled banana peppers and fennel pollen. To add some crunch to the appetizer, Alan grinds and then cooks prosciutto ends until crispy and adds shallot and smoked Spanish paprika oils to flavor the crumbles and then garnish the dish.

Now it's your turn to use your imagination and creativity to design some new eats. On the facing page (page 20), read about one of my favorite spring aperitivos, Italian Stuffed Artichokes and Asparagus Wrapped in Prosciutto.



Photos, clockwise from top: Appetizers served at a Canadian bonfire; Hawaiian Ahi Poke; Cheesy Bites; Shrimp and Crab Stack.



The work of freelance writer and photographer Tracy Beard has been published in many regional, national, and international magazines. Her stories focus on luxury and adventure travel, outdoor activities, spas, fine dining, and traditional and trendy libations. She attended culinary school in San Francisco, and owned a catering company, adding to her enjoyment and authoritative understanding of food. Formerly of Longview, she now lives in Vancouver, Wash.